

Abstract

This dissertation thesis encompasses a critical discourse analysis of the power correlates of expert knowledge and other factors that can hinder the open and unbiased discussion concerning the ethical aspects of the use of nonhuman animals in biomedical experiments. A brief history of “the animal” is first provided before the issue is positioned within the theoretical framework of Animal Studies. The fourth chapter is composed of an overview of the most frequent arguments both for and against the use of animals in biomedicine. The author draws upon her research as she analyzes scientific texts to reveal how laboratory animals are socially constructed as scientific objects and subsequently describes the effects this has on the perception of their moral value. A series of semi-structured interviews with critics and advocates of animal experimentation, such as animal rights activists and laboratory workers who conduct experiments on animals, is the pivotal section of the paper. It is established that lab workers in the sample are convinced of the necessity and legitimacy of current practices, that lab workers have a tendency to suppress animals’ individuality when describing their work, that lab workers deem their critics as being uninformed and incompetent at entering into the discussion, and that lab workers admit to being unfamiliar with their opponents’ arguments. Activists interviewed for research purposes stress ethical arguments based on the principles of justice and on the rejection of human supremacy. Methodological arguments pertaining to the imperfect transferability of results obtained from animals onto human patients, as well as the availability of alternative methods, were also cited by the activists. The author concludes that mutual understanding is required from both sides and that open discussion will contribute to the progress of both ethics and science.

Key words: animals, critical animal studies, animal rights, animal experimentation, bioethics